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AUTHOR Harlacher, Ervin L.
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ABSTRACT

The community college should be the catalyst to reverse the downward trend of community change. A community renewal college would serve as a change agent for the betterment of life conditions at the local level. Such a college would unite and improve the community by bringing its residents together and teaching them the attitudes, skills, and knowledge they need to better themselves and society. Community colleges have tried to mitigate the elitism of 4-year colleges, but even they have emphasized degree-oriented curricula. In a community renewal college, students would learn to want to learn, not to get a degree but to gain the necessary tools for a productive life. Three types of learning locales in addition to the central campus would be provided: (1) learning sites all over the community; (2) adjunct centers; and (3) extension centers. Individual learning rates and styles could be accommodated in evaluation and in flexible entry and exit periods for courses. To make this concept effective, all of the college must become more involved in all of the community and vice versa. Community services programs help to accomplish this goal. College administrators must learn to see community problems as shared problems of the campus and must reorder many priorities and rethink many assumptions. At present, however, implementation of the community renewal college concept is hampered by the rules of State education and accreditation agencies. (KM)

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Monmouth County, New Jersey

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The Community Renewal College

Ervin L. Harlacher

The commonplace that "the only constant is change" is, nevertheless, a truism that describes most communities in America today. Nonstatic by nature, community change, like an elevator car, continually travels in one of two directions: up or down. Unfortunately, the elevator of change in too many communities across the nation is on its way down -- and gathering momentum. Its direction can be reversed, but only if the community, resisting apathy and uniting as one, can find the will to push the "up" button before the elevator car crashes to the bottom of the shaft.

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United action, however, is not an attribute with which communities are inherently endowed. Midwifed by adversity and suckled by determination, it can grow to vigorous maturity and in time reverse what seems to be a declining community's inevitable destiny. But, because communities are composed of diverse groups and individuals, seldom can these components be drawn together in concerted effort to prevent or reverse downward trends unless a catalyzing agent consolidates and directs their energies. The community college can and should be that catalyst.

What I now envision for the community of Monmouth County -- indeed, for every community in the land -- is a Community Renewal College: one that would vitalize a network of learning sites to make the entire college district a laboratory for learning;

one that would emphasize multi-media, multi-modal self instructional learning systems, free scheduled courses and recognize that what is learned is more important than what is taught; one that would take advantage of its ever-recurring opportunities to participate in the continuous re-creation, the restructuring of the society of which it is a part. A new social invention, at least in some of its aspects, it would be in fact -- not just in name -- "Democracy's College," a true "people's college," unconfined by any campus, decentralized and flourishing in every corner of the real world of its community. It would have as its mission helping individuals to grow and develop in a variety of ways; helping them to reach maximum employment; helping them to acquire the skills, attitudes, and knowledge to restore and improve their neighborhoods; helping them to reach the enlightened judgments so critical to our society; helping them, at last, to create a learning society. Serving as a change agent for the betterment of life conditions at the local level, it might well be the only place in our communities where all of the children of all of the people would meet and mix and meld. It would bring younger and older learners together so that the premises, many of them false, that now bolster the generation gap might disappear. It would reach into every corner of our communities, touch every citizen, rejuvenate community pride, lift the educational achievement for all of our people and their children. And it would stress community service as the cornerstone of every curriculum -- for service and knowledge are the handmaidens of community renewal.

The Community Renewal College would emphasize that society, like democracy, is not an inert heirloom to be handed down intact from generation to generation. Rather, because conditions of its environment are perennially in flux, society must be re-created

by generation after generation, so that the costly disease of community decay and the wasteful erosion of human resources can be prevented. For three decades, now, we have been witnessing the almost desperate attempts of government to redevelop those blighted areas that, through neglect and indifference, had been allowed to crumble, and to rehabilitate those human beings who crumbled with them. Yet, federal programs -- conditioned, perhaps, by the immediacy of the housing problem -- have concentrated almost exclusively on building houses and have failed to build a rounded community. In consequence, as David Rockefeller once observed, "while people were placed in new and better housing, they were not placed into a new and better form of community life."

Placing people into a new and better form of community life is synonymous with the concept of the Community Renewal College. But, if concept is to become reality, much time, patience, careful study, and meticulous planning for implementation will be required. And, because of their wide acquaintance with community leaders and agencies, their well-developed relationships with business and industry, the Community Services staff is uniquely equipped to render yeoman service in coordinating these preliminary activities. With their help in spearheading the project, the institution may then reach into every corner of the community, touch every citizen, rejuvenate community pride, lift the level of educational achievement for all of the people and all of their children.

To help eliminate community problems, greater numbers of citizens need further education; they need to have a clearer understanding of their environments and the conditions of life that exist there and, from that understanding, to develop a determination

to change the conditions they perceive to be bad. But neither understanding nor determination come about automatically. People must be led to both and shown how to put them to work. Though government has poured untold billions into the solving of community problems, the outlook on life of the people who make up the community -- and, largely, its problems -- has seldom been changed. Clearly, money alone is not the answer for, despite government largesse, social and economic inequities of life styles continue to exist; segments of the community continue to isolate themselves from other segments; the problems of the poor in large part continue to be "their" problems. What we have today is a fragmented society with little, if any, community conscience. In a nation where education and learning are rapidly becoming the major industry, that industry is already failing if it does no more than it has been doing to check this disastrous trend.

Traditionally, the mission of higher education has been to emancipate the young, to free them from the shackles of the environments into which they were born. The fallacy of that mission is that it was predicated upon professional exclusiveness and social snobbery. Community colleges, almost from their inception, have been trying to mitigate this fallacy by offering further educational opportunity to all who could profit from it. But even they have been guilty of limiting their offerings to prescribed curricula that are degree oriented. They have tended to overlook the fact that it is not the degree that enables an individual to cope with the problems of everyday life, but how well he has learned to apply the knowledge he has -- in whatever amount -- to the solving of those problems. This required intellectual skills that can be learned as easily at the

community college level as in the groves of academe. But, too many people are still caught up in the lock-step of tradition, believing that college is four walls, college is semester-length courses, college is credit, college is culturally and educationally elite -- college, in short, is beyond their reach.

In my Community Renewal College, that lock-step could be broken once and for all. There, community aspirations rather than those of an indivudual nature could be the focal point of student interest. Students could learn that degrees in themselves are not important; that what really counts is the kind of persons they are, what they can do, how well they can live with others, what contributions they can make to those who share their life circumstances. And, they would inevitably develop a thirst for knowledge -- not because of the publicly-defined status a degree awarded at the end of some prescribed course of study gives them, but because knowledge provides them with the necessary tools to perpetuate a productive life in a constantly renewing society.

Henry David Thoreau provided educators a long time ago with the clue to what is needed. "Students," he wrote in Walden, "should not play life, or study it merely, ... but earnestly live it from the beginning to end. How could youths better learn to live than by at once trying the experiment of living?" Only now are educators beginning to hear his message.

Colleges, nationwide, have been content to provide scale models, mock-ups, and dry runs for students, the while they were surrounded by community resources that could provide real production runs in real situations on real time. That is "playing life," studying it without becoming involved in it. As Frank Jennings, writing in

Change Magazine has suggested, "Five rooms in each of a hundred high-rise apartment houses, plus fifty store fronts and a half dozen desks in police precincts and welfare offices would provide more meaningful space that the 'bastard-Gothic baronial halls' that characterize the conventional college."

The opportunities out in the community for life experiences " from the beginning to end," as Thoreau expressed it, are abundant. For the purpose of education, though it is career oriented, is not merely to help young people learn how to make a decent living; its larger purpose is to make them know how to live zestfully, meaningfully; how to think, feel, understand, and -- most importantly -- act with intelligence. If the renewal of society and of its environment -- a perennial need -- is to progress with measurable results, then the Community Renewal College must shoulder the responsibility for leading the way.

Students must be free to learn what they need and want to learn -- not what pedagogues have decided it is "good" for them to learn. If this is to happen, though, community resources must be utilized to the fullest extent as laboratories and training shops, reservoirs of learning materials, cultural experiences, the study of our basic institutions and the laws that govern them. In an extension of its current community services function, therefore, the Community Renewal College would have learning sites in factories and foundries, in government and business offices, in welfare agencies and computer centers, in hospitals, museums, art centers, libraries. It would set up strategically located adjunct centers and extension centers to provide all the people in its community with learning services.

An adjunct center is a stationary installation, housing either a part of the degree program or operated under the supervision of the College's Community Services Institute. I have already spoken of Brookdale's adjunct Community Learning Center in Long Branch and its varied community services -- omitting only mention of the day care center it operates for the children of working mothers. I have also talked about Sandy Hook State Park. A third adjunct center, operated by the Institute of Natural and Applied Sciences, is located in a third subcommunity called Middletown where health-related degree programs are concentrated and which also houses the automatoive, electronics and drafting and design technologies.

An extension center, on the other hand, is located in outlying areas of the county and offers credit courses toward a degree curriculum. It also serves as a check point for students where instructors, media specialists, and student development specialists are regularly available to help with problem solving. Classes are largely "free scheduled" so that students my pursue their learning tasks independently, or meet with their instructors in small or large groups as their needs dictate.

But the activities involved in the learning process are focused upon the several community sites.

Three types of learning locales now become available in addition to that provided by the central campus: the adjunct learning center, focused on local needs or specific curricula; the extension center, focused on further formal education; and the learning site, developed from the community, where learning experiences accrue from on-the-job training.

At the learning sites, decentralization really begins. Here, college personnel provide prescribed learning experiences, selected to fit the objectives of each unit of learning that, in total, comprise a course of study and which priorly have been validated according to criteria-based validating techniques. In the learning process, site personnel cooperate with college personnel, either by practical demonstrations of principles to be learned or through supervision, working in teams with the instructors. Successful completion of a unit is not determined by the number of hours spent, but by whether or not the student has accomplished the unit's objectives with full understanding.

Achievement of objectives is gauged through the use of built-in evaluative devices periodically applied to keep abreast of individual learning rates. Thus, entry and exit periods in a given course of study are not fixed, but remain flexible so that individual learning styles can be accommodated. Nor is the student penalized because at some point, and for some reason, he is forced to drop out. Re-entry into the program remains a constantly available option. A "people's college" is always the college of another chance. Whether or not we can always agree with the utterances of Vice President Agnew, we cannot, in good conscience, deny the truth of his statement that "We must stop developing educational programs for twelve years or sixteen or twenty years, and start creating programs that gear themselves to useful, satisfying lives."

The Community Renewal College, in trying to create such programs, make all possible use of community personnel -- whether at its learning sites or on its

central campus. On the campus, these people are particularly useful during the briefing sessions that take place prior to students' assignment to real-world sites for on-the-spot learning. This is especially important in helping students to make wise career choices, and in giving them insight into the everyday operations within the professions and vocations to which they aspire.

The ultimate mission of the Community Renewal College is to make the college and community synonymous -- a completely integrated oneness. Community services programs have already served to move the college toward this goal by bringing in community personnel in both adivisory and instructional capacities. But the interaction -- the developing oneness -- between college and community goes farther than the interchange of college and community personnel. As students move out from the central campus to use community resources for learning experiences, they find opportunity for community service both they and the college were unaware existed. For learning, like any other life pursuit, is not a one-way street: it requires giving as well as getting. Somewhere, the learning that has been acquired must be put to use; otherwise, it's a pelican's trophy. And the opportunities for giving are rife: tutoring fellow-students and those at the elementary and secondary levels, poll-taking for political organizations, surveys for new and developing industries, job opportunity surveys for employment agencies, joining community groups in identifying community needs and concerns - the list is endless.

We at Brookdale regard these activities as building an experience background, so that when the student is ready to take charge of his own life, he will have both

training and experience to offer his employer. Thus, we believe that none of these activities -- except those in behalf of volunteer organizations -- should be on a voluntary basis. This is cooperative education at its best for, in the long run, it serves both the community and the student -- but not solely in a monetary sense. By these means, the college not merely becomes involved in the community; it identifies with it, its needs and values, its interests and goals.

As I have already suggested, the traditional mission of education, particularly at the university level, has been the emancipation of the young -- usually, the selectively designated young. Though it welcomes the extraordinary, the open-door community college reaches out for the ordinary -- the sometimes uncommon common men who, throughout the nation's history, have made so many quiet contributions to its greatness. These are the men for whom life in a democratic society must be made to hold unique opportunities. The Community Renewal College, therefore, as a community-based institution, likewise seeks to emancipate -- not the young alone, but all of the people within its geographical boundaries: emancipation, that is from the restrictions of ignorance and the repressions of socioeconomic disadvantage; from unemployment, bad housing and poor schooling; from poverty and disease; from environmental stagnation and pollution. NOT from the community itself.

By its very concept, the Community Renewal College -- like the program of community services on which it is based -- must take its services beyond the limits of its central campus(es). This does not mean, however, that the established campus ought to be abandoned, for it is part and parcel of the over-all enterprise. Here students are briefed in the basics of their major fields of endeavor, be they

university oriented or occupation bound. Here they develop representative ideas and methods of inquiry in social and behavioral sciences that will enable them to function well in the real-world situations their community will provide. And here, if you will, they find identity with a home base to which they can periodically return for redirection when their own paths become blurred, and for reassurance when they falter in their determination. In other words, the central campus serves as a structuring agent for what otherwise might become merely diffuse activities

Nor are these the only functions of the central campus. It continues to bolster the community services program by providing services and facilities that are open to community use: its recreational facilities for community recreation, its learning resources centers for independent study, its cultural programs, its forums, and its consultancies. It serves, also, as the hub of a communications system, radiating via computer terminals and closed or open circuit TV to its adjunct and numerous extension centers and learning sites, spotted in strategic locations throughout the autonomous subcommunities that comprise its service area.

As I envision the Community Renewal College, it is neither a self-serving institution that offers its standardized program to those who can make use of it, nor a two-year imitation of the "university without walls." I see its role, not so much as being concerned with the attainment of external or internal higher degrees as equipping all of the people for doing battle at a pragmatist's level with the vicissitudes of life.

In this respect, the program of community services forms a vanguard for community development. As these services expand, so does the college. At Brookdale, for instance, our Community Services Institute has developed programs in such community renewing subjects as "Aging -- American Style" (Helping middle-aged citizens to prepare for their status as senior citizens); "Women and the World of Work" (helping mature women to enter or return to careers); "Youth, Society, and Drugs" (helping parents and their children understand the consequences of drug abuse). In its conference on pollution abatement, the Institute arranged for unemployed and about-to-be-retired engineers, technologists, and scientists to come together for the purpose of encouraging new definitions of pollution problems, creating innovative designs for measuring and monitoring air and water quality, and developing new processes to combat specific pollution problems. In such ways does Community Services help to move the college into the community.

The Community Renewal College goes one step further. It attempts to exemplify the purposes of higher education laid down by Peter Loewenberg in the November 1969 issue of the Journal of Higher Education: "The very spirit of education," he wrote, "is to help a student to realize his own potentialities, to let him discover what he really can do, not as imitation, not in response to command, nor because it has been charted for him, but because he has acquired a new view of himself and his capacity."

Becoming a Community Renewal College requires significant change on our part:

First, we must change our stance -- our concept of setting. As college administrators, we must learn to read of the day's community events and the events which are happening to us, not them. Crime in our streets, not their streets; our politicians, not their politicians, our businessmen, not their businessmen; and our policemen, not their policemen. The problems of the community should be seen as the shared problems of the campus. We must seek opportunities to make a contribution to the life off campus, and to match our resources to off-campus needs just as vigorously as we seek to apply them to campus problems. No longer may we safely enjoy the luxury of a detached concern for the world outside. The poverty, the crime, the corruption, the pollution, the problems of the ill and aging are our problems, too; and, there is not one of us that is not rich in resources which could be brought to bear. We have skilled manpower, expertise the community can use, we have facilities -- from athletic fields to theatres, which can be opened to those who are not regularly enrolled students -- art rooms, laboratories, lecture halls and basketball courts. When our community's students aren't in them, our senior citizens, our youth and our housewives should be.

For years, we have sent expeditions abroad from our colleges and universities -- foreign language students to Europe, archeologists to Asia, anthropologists to Mexico and Central America: the excitement of foreign shores lends glitter to our educational programs; yet right outside our hallowed halls is a language of the streets we have yet to understand, cultures we have yet to

appreciate, and suffering people, many lacking the basic amenities which we seek to bring to foreign lands. We must turn our attention to these needs on the doorsteps in our communities, for they are our needs.

Secondly, we must reoreder many of our priorities and rethink many of our assumptions regarding "College" itself. Talk of the sidewalk college, or "street academies," the open university and the external degree are moving us in that direction. But, we must go well beyond our present thinking to create community renewal colleges -- colleges that are committed to renewal in all of its forms: human renewal for all of our people; urban renewal of our cities and neighborhoods; environmental renewal of the greater communities we serve, political renewal that is so critical in a republic that is based on the premise, "the people shall judge," and yes, even perhaps the moral and spiritual renewal of a great nation.

Renewal implies much more than closing the gap between "town and gown." Renewal implies more than the mere offering of services to our community -- contemporary society is replete with examples of "servicing human beings to death while never answering their deepest needs" and, thus, building in forever frustration and dispair and alienation on the part of the people of our communities. Renewal also implies more than mere penetration into the community -- it implies a change in human behavior, an end to ill-planned ineffective life support systems, and it implies a new style of community action to replace the "service-oriented" systems of delivery to which so many human beings have become totally addicted. Renewal is a process of regeneration, of restoring life where there is death, whether it be

for the individual or for the community. Renewal is what the learning process is all about. And learning is what the community college is all about.

At the present time, of course, full implementation of the Community Renewal College concept is somewhat difficult, for it is subject to the rules and regulations of state education and accreditation agencies whose views of such innovativeness are still structured by, if you will forgive me, university standards. To accommodate the reality of change requires that we take a stand against this entrenched hierarchy that claims exclusive determination of what does or does not constitute "acceptable" academic preparation. Where, or how, or under what conditions learning takes place is not important. The important thing is that it take place and, after it has taken place, that it can be used profitable.

The Community Renewal College, to be truly functional, must move into the community and employ as many paths to learning as are needed to service the needs of its heterogeneous student body and constituencies. It must have latitude in its grading system, freedom to aware transferable credits for courses designed as cultural enrichment for vocational students and now unrecognized by the universities. Undoubtedly, the community colleges and the universitites will get together in the next few years. We live in a relaistic society which, increasingly, is bringing all of higher education under close scrutiny. Therefore, all of higher education must demonstrate concern for all the people: not alone for those whose individual bents take them into the graduate school, nor merely for those whose aspirations lead them into lesser paths of endeavor. In the meantime, let us continue to support our community services programs which already have demonstrated that concern for all the people is their reason for being.

President Howard Johnson of MIT, though not intentionally, has summed up very well the purposes of the Community Renewal College in these words: "I believe that our students should be educated at the level of personal responsibility and contribution to society. I mean by this that they must learn not only how to get but to give. Whether one relates this to a family, a university, a company, or a country, the young men and women of today must know that they have a contribution to make, if society is to improve."

Finally, the Community Renewal College could lead the way to the creation of a new order of existence in American life -- a new renaissance. Time has come to turn to our communities. We need to assert through positive action the responsibility we share as citizens to become a vital part of our communities -- to share the joys, sorrows, the problems and promises as our own. In so doing, we will help to create a better neighborhood, a better county and a better tomorrow.

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